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### **Different neighbourhoods but also different people?**

**Case-study realised in four neighborhoods in Flanders, searching for differences and relations (inter)between the physical characteristics of the areas and the lifestyles of their inhabitants.**

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### **Introduction**

In the past planners or designers often tried to describe or understand inhabitants in relation to their demographic or socio-economic profile (children, young families, elderly people, mid-income families, singles, ...), meantime focussing on the quantitative demand for new housing types or areas for these focus groups. In other fields researchers use the concept of lifestyles to explore the consumers diversity in relation to their consumption (= marketing), societal aspects (= sociology) (Bourdieu,1984) or individual value-patterns or personality traits (= psychology).

In Flanders, the idea of lifestylegroups is not yet introduced in the planners-world and this PhD-research can be seen as a first explorative step. The aim is to focus on the concept of lifestyles in general, to introduce a typology of lifestyles within the Flemish context and to explore relations between lifestyles and housing environments in order to develop new concepts for spatial planners dealing with the design of housing environments or with the adaptation of older housing areas.

The issue addressed by the paper is an aspect of the latter one, focussing on the relations between lifestyles of inhabitants and characteristics of their physical housing environments. The idea that there is a relation between the people and their neighbourhoods is not new and has been studied before by researchers as Wirth, Bourdieu, Rapoport (1967) amongst many others.

### **Methods**

The lifestyles of the inhabitants are explored through four main concepts or themes, extracted from recent Flemish research projects looking for the factors driving demand preferences for different housing environments, and being economic status, openness, (un)safety and ecology. A field study is carried out in four housing areas in Flanders, sampled from a cluster analysis. Two different methods are used. On the one hand the physical appearance of the neighbourhoods is analysed, as seen by an outsider, a non-resident. On the other hands a representative selection of inhabitants is questioned on their appreciation of their neighbourhood and on their lifestyle-characteristics.

## **Results**

This approach results in maps and pictures of the four neighbourhoods, showing for example the different status or openness of the areas and in lifestyle-groups based on the quantitative analysis of the survey. The confrontation of both sources makes it possible to confirm or deny relations between inhabitants and their neighbourhoods. A first analysis learns that a relation can be confirmed but not for all the themes, and that there are meaningful differences in homogeneity of the population in the four neighbourhoods.

## **Further research.**

The next step in the research will focus on the implementation of this information into the planning policy and practices.

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